

If You Want to Live

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Companies use different marketing strategies in order to gain more customers. One such strategy, which is also the most effective, is advertising through television commercials. These can air nationally or internationally. The goal of most television-advertisement directors is to make an ad that has a high impact and is memorable in less than a minute. This was the goal Lance Acor of Park Pictures production company had in mind when directing Subaru's national advertising campaign for the 2014 television advertisement, "They Lived." One of the reasons this ad stands out from others is because of its unusual nature compared to the typical car commercials, which usually consist of vehicles speeding on scenic back roads or families piling into their minivan. Instead, this commercial takes on a more serious, dramatic approach and emphasizes the importance of safety in Subaru's vehicles using the techniques of emotional transfer, fear, and testimonial to appeal to both our emotional and analytical minds.

The ad begins with the scene of a highway accident in the evening. We hear Miles Hankings' "Clear Moment," song playing with its soft-piano during the whole commercial giving it an overall emotional feeling of melancholy (Subaru, 2014). In the accident scene, we see a Subaru Outback so badly damaged that it cannot be towed and is on a flatbed truck. The police officer handling the accident tells the truck operator, "They lived" (Subaru, 2014, 00:05). The expression of the flat-bed-truck-driver is that of complete surprise and genuine relief for the owners of the Subaru who survived the car wreck. The vehicle is taken to a junk yard, and one of the workers, who has most likely seen a thousand totaled vehicles, stops the driver to look at the terrible mess the vehicle is in, but the driver also tells him, "They lived" (Subaru, 2014, 00:10). More and more of the vehicle is revealed each time these words are said. The worker tells a heavy-machinery operator the same story in two words as well: "They lived" (Subaru, 2014,

00:015). This takes up more than half of the commercial, and up to this point, these are the only words spoken. The viewer is left pondering after finally seeing a full picture of the pile of disfigured steel that once was a Subaru Outback.

We are then moved to a scene of a seemingly perfect family home situated in what seems like the perfect suburban neighborhood. Two parents alongside their two children are walking out the front door of their home toward their new vehicle, giving the impression that this was the family that survived this horrible car wreck. The camera focuses on the father and what is apparently his voice says, “We lived. Thanks to our Subaru” (Subaru, 2014, 00:23). A wide angle view of the new vehicle the family has chosen, which is of course the new Subaru Outback, is followed by a final scene consisting of white space informing viewers of the fact that for the fourth consecutive year the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) has recognized Subaru as the only manufacturer with a Top Safety Pick for all models (Subaru, 2014, 00:26). Then the word “love” comes on the screen and fades away as the narrator states the company slogan: “Love. It’s what makes a Subaru, a Subaru” (Subaru, 2014, 00:28).

This ad shows Subaru celebrating and stressing the importance of safety in a vehicle, thus targeting a very wide market, families, and using the techniques of emotional transfer and fear. When parents go car shopping their main interest is not speed in a car or how luxurious it may look, rather, they are more concerned with safety. People, including children are always going to die in auto accidents because it’s a dangerous world. We are all safer sitting at home than driving any car. Subaru does not deny this fact—it humbly accepts it. It does, however, claim that fewer people die in their cars. This claim is supported by the statistics and safety testing proudly displayed at the end of the commercial. Lopez (2004) notes that, “Fear messages are directed at our insecurities” (p. 2). In the case of this ad, the knowledge that cars are one of the most

dangerous parts of our daily lives is well known. By showing the complete devastation of the wrecked car, Subaru is presenting us with a very possible situation, and one that is a very real fear.

The ad never states the price of this vehicle, nor does it focus on the interior or any specific feature of the vehicle as other vehicle commercials do. Subaru uses other techniques of emotion to get their message through. From the very first note played on piano in that opening scene of the car-wreck to the last scene displaying the word “love,” the commercial also appeals to our inner most feelings of vulnerability. Subaru knows we need to be taken care of. They want us to know that they know what it is like to be in hard situations. With their slogan, “Love. It’s what makes a Subaru, a Subaru,” they’re telling viewers that they’re not just a car-manufacturer, they’re a whole ensemble of people, car-manufacturing machinery, and robots that care and love Subaru’s clients (Subaru, 2014, 00:28). Dachis (2011) talks about this emotional response we have when we see commercials: “In general [all ads] aim to keep you from thinking and, instead, make your buying choices based on an emotional response” (“How Manipulative Advertising Works,” para. 1). This is not to say emotions are bad, but without a balance of emotion and logic you might not always make the best choices. Emotional ads try to capitalize on that phenomenon. An effective ad gets you to buy the product. In doing this they also use emotional transfer which “is the process of generating emotions in order to transfer them to a product. . . The point is to make you feel good and to transfer that feeling to the brand or product” (Lopez, 2004, p. 2). By constructing an experience of fear, but then providing us with the relief through the constant repetition of “they lived” and the image of the healthy, happy family at the end of the commercial, we transfer feelings of relief and security to Subaru.

It's not only the images and music in this ad that are aimed at our emotions. The word *lived* is mentioned four times in this thirty-second commercial. This is yet another example of how ads influence consumer behavior. When explaining how this influence works Simler (2014) notes, "This is a decidedly *Pavlovian* account of ad efficacy. Like Pavlov's dogs, who learned to associate the ringing of a bell with subsequent food delivery, humans too can be trained to make more-or-less arbitrary associations" (para. 6). By Subaru repeating the word *lived* and then showing one of its vehicles, we'll come to associate Subaru with living and not dying. Perhaps because of the stark contrast with the horribly smashed automobile and the happy ending of living, this is even more powerful. In an odd twist, using the worst image of a car works to connect us to positive ideas about the product.

Subaru truly does make what are considered some of the safest vehicles around. They have the statistics and proof of it through their year after year awards for Safety. While this is good, they also use it as a testimonial. According to Lopez (2004), testimonials "are statements by people explaining why certain products are great. Famous or plain folk, or actors can do them. This is more powerful when someone we really like or respect endorses a product (such as Tiger Woods or Michael Jordan)" (p. 2). In this case, we have both groups' testimony. Everyone involved with the car from the father to the flatbed driver are testifying to the car's safety. At the end, the faceless narrator provides the information about Subaru's award-winning safety statistics. In this case, we get testimonial from both the regular person and the expert. These testimonies appeal to both our emotional and analytical minds.

Whether they make their vehicles thinking solely out of love and care for future clients or not is unclear. For the most part, companies are overwhelmingly more interested in a client's money and in competing with other companies for recognition. However, Subaru's use of

emotional transfer and testimonial is unique. They appeal to both our logic and our hearts to sway us toward their products. While they have the facts to support their safety records, not all ads that use emotional appeals like this do. In looking at this ad carefully, we can better see how advertisers use our emotions to link us to their products. Only after close examination do we really read between the lines of companies' advertisements. Therefore, when we make a purchase choice it must be based on reasoning and logic, not the emotional response advertisers expect us to have.

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